



# GRATEFUL DEAD

ALL THE YEARS COMBINE THE DVD COLLECTION



# Annotation

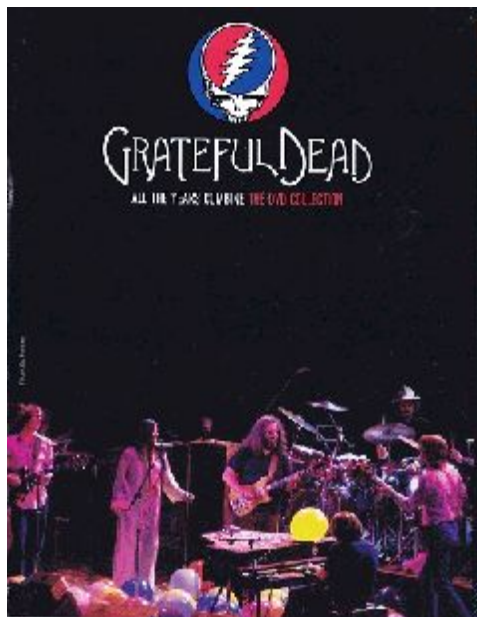
The book came with full "Grateful Deads" DVD set. It has a stories behind the creation all the disks through the years. Lots of colored pictures included.

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**Blair Jackson**

**It's a rainbow full of sound...**

# Grateful Dead: All the years combine

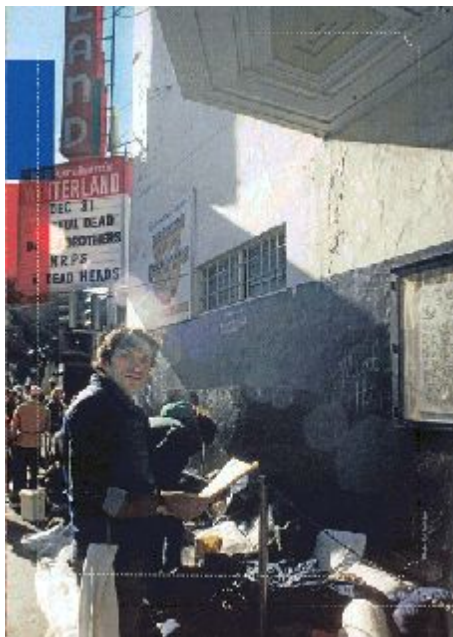


The Grateful Dead was the most recorded band in history. Their legendary tape vault contains thousands of master audio tapes of performances dating back to 1966, from stereo reel-to-reels to cassettes to two-inch multitracks. But film and video? Not so much, really, until the late 1980s.

Why? Well, there are several reasons. Audio recordings were easy to manage, even in the days of stereo reels. Owsley "Bear" Stanley, who became the group's first dedicated soundman (not to mention the San Francisco scene's leading LSD maker and advocate), believed that the musicians could learn something from listening to recordings of their performances and rehearsals, and though they were not scrupulous about it their first couple of years, eventually taping shows became an important part of their routine. The result is a deep vault that is the envy of bands from that era who didn't have the same foresight as the Dead — in other words, everybody else!

But in the late '60s and early '70s, video cameras were expensive and cumbersome and required a whole crew to operate (not to mention a command center with monitors and switching equipment and such) at a time when the band wasn't making very much money. Appearing on TV wasn't really an option, either — there was barely any rock'n'roll on television in the late '60s except short guest spots on

programs like *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *Shindig!* or *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, none of which were clamoring for the decidedly underground Grateful Dead.



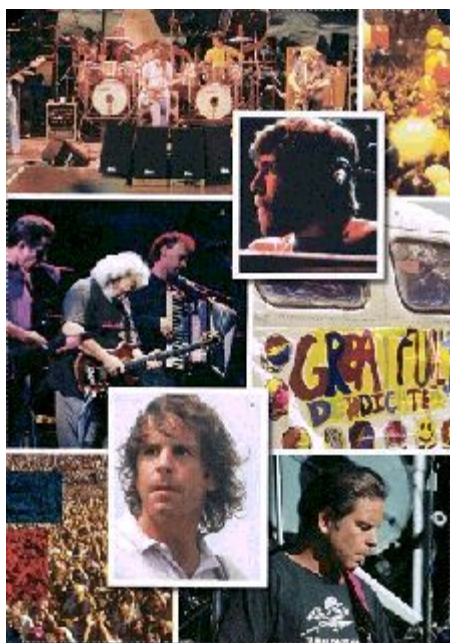
There were a couple of odd appearances by the band here and there — like the time in 1969 when the group turned up on Hugh Hefner's *Playboy After Dark* TV show, shot on a soundstage in L.A. decorated to look like a swinging bachelor pad and populated by buxom young women and well-manicured young men. Someone in the Dead's traveling party spiked some of the beverages being consumed offstage with acid, leading to probably the loosest and craziest episode of that show ever aired.

But the Grateful Dead, and Jerry Garcia in particular, felt that TV was too limiting a medium for a band that was all about expansive playing and musical exploration on their own terms. As Garcia told me in the summer of 1987, right as the Dead were ascending to their greatest commercial peak behind the success of "Touch Of Grey" and their *In The Dark* album: "I just have no stomach for playing on television — it's just the wrong form for the Grateful Dead. I mean, it's about time for us to tune up. Also, television is kind of reductive; the band playing on television seems reduced. It doesn't come through."

Nevertheless, the Dead did consent to be taped in early 1970 — along with Jefferson Airplane and Santana — for a commercial-free hour-long Public Television special called *A Night At The Family Dog*

(which included nice segments of each group playing, plus a "super jam" featuring members of all three). And later that year, San Francisco Public TV affiliate KQED televised a live concert from San Francisco's Winterland (simulcast over KQED-FM and free-form rock radio pioneer KSAN) featuring the Dead, the Airplane, Quicksilver and Hot Tuna. Alas, no video from that event has ever surfaced; it's lost to the ages.

In the spring of 1972 the Dead appeared twice on European TV during the group's storied first overseas tour — in Copenhagen, Denmark, and in Bremen, Germany — but neither of those performances have been released commercially yet. Then, in the summer of '72, the Dead agreed to be filmed by a camera crew at a show they played in rural Oregon in 100-degree heat. That legendary LSD-drenched show was the basis for a film called *Sunshine Daydream*, which has been heavily bootlegged through the years, but not formally released either.



A year later, in the fall of 1973, the Grateful Dead were approached about inaugurating a new syndicated late-night TV series called *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*, but as former manager Jon McIntire explained recently: "Because we didn't have singles, and because our songs were long, exposure on commercial television was not really available to us. But it also had to do with the band's philosophy, which mostly came from Jerry, who really didn't want the music broken up with commercial breaks. Like the most [time] you

have is 11 minutes between commercials. So every time there was an objection, I'd get [the producers of *Rock Concert*] to make a concession. I got the unions to make a concession — in those days they wouldn't allow a band to mix their own music. I got them to change that. I got them to agree to let us do it by saying, 'You know, if you make a mistake, you're going to cause bleeding eardrums in the first 20 rows of people. Are you willing to take that on? No.' I also got them to shift around the commercial break so we'd have more time. But what Jerry's objection finally boiled down to was having the music presented ensconced in all those commercials. He felt that was not the way to see the Grateful Dead. It wasn't consistent with who we were. I agree with him now, but at the time it was totally frustrating to me because I thought, 'You guys want to be exposed to more people, but you don't know how to do it!'" (The band also rejected a more intriguing offer — to tape a series of TV specials of the Dead playing at sacred spots around the globe, from Stonehenge to Easter Island. "They turned it down," McIntire said with a laugh. "They just didn't want television.")

So that brings us up to 1974 and **The Grateful Dead Movie**, which is where this DVD collection begins chronologically. The group decided in the summer of '74 that they wanted to take a break. They'd been playing steadily since 1965, slowly but surely becoming more popular, but by 1974 their touring operation had spiraled out of control, thanks in part to their investment in and development of the largest PA system ever assembled by a band — the justly famous and awe-inspiring Wall of Sound. It sounded fantastic, but it was a bear to haul around, set up and tear down, and also a serious financial drain. Something had to give — so how 'bout a hiatus? Get away from the road grind, recharge the batteries, work on solo projects close to home. With little warning, the band scheduled a series of five farewell-for-now concerts at Winterland for mid-October '74 and hired a film crew of nine, coordinated by director Leon Gast, to capture the shows — both onstage and all around the decrepit but charming venue, inside and out.

Garcia had long harbored a desire to get involved with filmmaking, so this project provided the perfect opportunity for him to dive into that world. And *The Grateful Dead Movie* (technically just titled *The Grateful Dead*) is truly Garcia's film, even though there was invaluable input from a cadre of film editors (led by Susan Crutcher) and many others. The film team and Garcia spent more than two-and-a-half years, on and off, putting the film together, assembling a work that in the end was a superb concert movie, a mind-bending and

adventurous experimental film, and an incredibly perceptive and hip portrait of the Dead Head fan base and their unique relationship to this "band beyond description." Has there ever been a film with more ecstatic hippie dancing?

*The Grateful Dead Movie* may be the single greatest document of the totality of the Grateful Dead experience. Even though it is really just a slice in time showing one incarnation of the group, it completely captures the group's magical essence — that joyous and strange mystical spirit that was a part of everything they did, from the Acid Tests in 1965 to the last concert at Soldier Field in Chicago in 1995, a month before Garcia's death. "Its energy is a good movie example of the Grateful Dead experience," Garcia commented in 1977, shortly after the film was released. "It's a translation of that idea, both coming from what it's like for me — in my head, as abstract ideas, nonspecific images — and what it's like for anybody. So the movie works for me. I can watch it and get a pretty good buzz: 'Hey, far out. That's an interesting thing.' That's what I tried to make happen there.

"In terms of the flow, the first part has a roughness. It's a little fuzzy, a little hot and not really gathered. Then, later on, the whole thing composes itself, until finally the cinematography is really incredible. In the second half, the clarity comes in. And that's a way of expressing that thing: When you go out and play, at first things are confusing — it's noisy, you're still trying to tune up, and the whole first half is like settling into something."

The spectacular hallucinatory animated sequence designed by Gary Gutierrez that opens the film was icing on the cake, and the performances are spellbinding throughout, offering a wonderful collection of Dead favorites, from "Truckin'" and "Eyes Of The World" to "Playing In The Band" and "Morning Dew." The sound, mixed down from multitrack reels, really captures both the musical breadth and sonic depth of the band, as well as the vibe of Winterland.

*The Grateful Dead Movie* proved commercially to be a popular videotape and laser disc release (remember those?) back in the day, but those formats seem ancient and quaint compared to the magnificent two-DVD set that was released in 2004 (30 years after the concerts), which is what appears in this collection. Besides boasting a completely new print transferred from the original 35mm negative in high-def, and new Dolby Digital stereo and 5.1 surround mixes, Disc 1 also features a running commentary by editors Susan Crutcher and John Nutt. Disc 2 contains an incredible collection of songs from those

October '74 shows, specially edited for that release, including "Uncle John's Band," "Dark Star," "The Other One," "China Cat Sunflower," "I Know You Rider," "Scarlet Begonias" and more. It's a dynamite 90-plus-minute concert in itself. Add to that documentary shorts about shooting the movie and the making of the animation sequence, a gallery of photos and lots more little treats, and you've got an amazing package, for which we must tip our hats to longtime Grateful Dead vaultmeister David Lemieux, whose tireless work on the project over several years allowed it to happen.

Winterland is also the setting for the next DVD on our timeline — specifically, the show recorded on December 31, 1978, when the Dead's traditional New Year's Eve concert also marked the final show at the venerable arena. With the corner property that held Winterland already sold, and demolition assuredly in its future, promoter Bill Graham turned December '78 into a celebration of the old venue, bringing in one top act after another, including Van Morrison, The Tubes, Ramones, Kenny Loggins, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers and, of course, the Grateful Dead (Winterland vets since '66!), who were joined for the evening by their old country-rock pals the New Riders Of The Purple Sage and serio-comedic R amp;B sensation-of-the-moment the Blues Brothers (featuring John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd of *Saturday Night Live*). The Dead's entire marathon three-set performance was televised live over KQED-TV in the Bay Area (and broadcast on KSAN), and this time it was also committed to videotape, so 25 years later the band could release another magnificent double-DVD set, **The Closing Of Winterland**.



It was a *lonnnnnng* night. The Dead didn't even go on until midnight, following another one of Bill Graham's classic New Year's entrances dressed as Father Time — on this night he descended from the balcony to the stage in a giant joint dubbed the S.S. *Colombian* and showered the delirious crowd below with rose petals and "funny cigarettes." What a guy! Balloons fell from the ceiling, the Dead kicked into their (semi-) traditional NYE midnight anthem "Sugar Magnolia,"

and the Winterland party officially went into overdrive. Their sets were peppered with new and old favorites, including "Scarlet Begonias" > "Fire On The Mountain," "Friend Of The Devil," "I Need A Miracle," "Terrapin Station," "Playing In The Band," "Not Fade Away," "Dark Star," "St. Stephen" and many more. The playing is loose but intense, the frequent peaks reliably transcendent. The sound — mixed from the 24-track master reels — is superb. Crank it up and you can really feel Phil Lesh's bass rumbling through the big hall. And Garcia seems to have a slightly wicked smile on his face much of the night; clearly he got off on it too! A few musician friends also stopped by to help out: harmonica players Lee Oskar (of War) and Matthew Kelly (of Kingfish); former Quicksilver axeman John Cipollina; and, during the amazing solo percussion segment in the second set, former Santana drummer Greg Errico and author/psychedelician Ken Kesey in his famously cacophonous Thunder Machine.

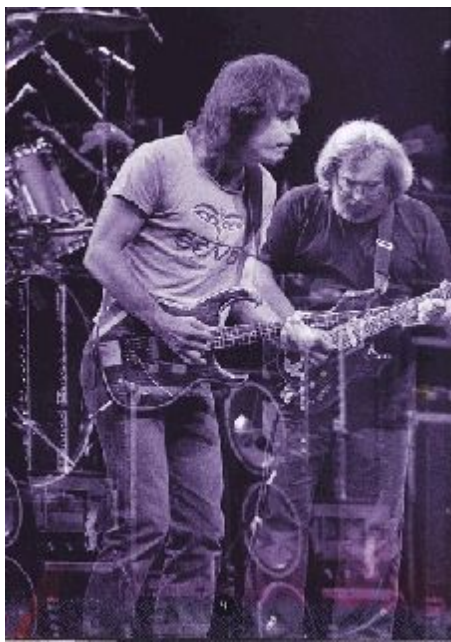


*The Closing Of Winterland* DVD is also packed with bonus features galore, including two songs by the Blues Brothers and one from the New Riders (which were shown during one of the set breaks during the original telecast); a documentary about Winterland; a "2 a.m. interview" with Bob Weir, Mickey Hart and Ken Kesey; another with Bill Graham; a mini-doc "Making Of" about putting the DVD together; a few different audio options; and more. All that's missing is the breakfast-in-a-bag that was handed out by Graham's troops to the weary but happy revelers as they left Winterland in the wee hours of January 1, 1979.

That DVD is by far the best audiovisual document we have of the much-loved lineup that included both Keith and Donna Godchaux *and* Mickey Hart. Three months after Winterland's swan song, the Godchauxs departed, and keyboardist Brent Mydland, who had been playing in Bob Weir's occasional solo band, hopped onboard for what would be the longest-running and most commercially successful incarnation of the Grateful Dead, spanning April 1979-July 1990.

In the fall of 1980 the Dead decided to celebrate their 15th anniversary *in style* by playing two special series of shows in elegant theaters (rather than the usual sports arenas they'd grown into). Inspired by Bob Dylan's two-week run at the intimate Warfield Theatre in San Francisco during his *Slow Train Coming* tour in 1979, Bill Graham booked the Dead there for 15 shows, to be followed by eight John Scher-produced concerts at that art deco wonder in the heart of Manhattan: Radio City Music Hall. The schedule was designed so the final concert at Radio City fell on Halloween — and would be simulcast as a closed-circuit pay-per-view event at 20 movie theaters stretching from Maine to Minnesota, the most ambitious project of that sort attempted by a rock group up to that point. To make the shows even more memorable, the band added an opening acoustic set each night — their first since 1970 — while retaining their usual two-set electric format as well. All 23 shows were recorded to multitrack for projected live album releases, and the fact that cameras would be on hand for the pay-per-view broadcast allowed the Dead to plan for a video release (VHS and laser disc) as well.

This is the point where Len Dell'Amico, who directed all of the remaining videos in this box, enters the story. Dell'Amico had shot the Dead a few times in the late '70s for the in-house video feed at John Scher's Capitol Theatre in Passaic, NJ. But he never actually met the band until he was flown out to San Francisco during the Dead's Warfield series in September-October '80 to talk about possibly directing the Halloween-night extravaganza at Radio City. "I was this nerdy New Yorker being thrown into this pot-smoking den of pirates," he recalled with a laugh recently. "But they needed someone who could shoot live music without a script, because they didn't know what they'd be playing, and I had a lot of experience shooting live music." He hit it off immediately with Garcia, who had been put in charge of recruiting a director for the telecast. By the end of the Warfield series, they had already committed to tape several short comedy bits that would be shown at different points in the telecast — hilarious backstage encounters featuring the *Saturday Night Live* comedy team of Al Franken and Tom Davis (both big Dead Heads) interacting with each of the band members and even some of the notorious Grateful Dead crew.



The Halloween pay-per-view was a grand success, both artistically and financially, and during the first part of 1981 Dell'Amico and Garcia put together **Dead Ahead** using songs from the Halloween show and the previous night's concert (the last three were taped) to simulate a mini Dead show in a little under two hours, interspersed with comic bits from Franken and Davis. The video opens with several acoustic tunes — including a trippy version of "Bird Song" and the old Memphis Jug Band nugget "On The Road Again" — then settles into a wide-ranging selection of electric numbers, including a sprightly reading of the cowboy combo of "Me amp; My Uncle" and "Mexicali Blues," "Ramble On Rose," "Lost Sailor" and "Saint Of Circumstance" (from their still-newish album *Go To Heaven*), "Franklin's Tower," "Fire On The Mountain" and several others. There's also a "drums" segment with guest rhythm beast Billy Cobham powerfully assisting Messrs. Kreutzmann and Hart. When *Dead Ahead* finally came out on DVD in 2005, the expanded edition (included here) contained about 50 minutes more music, highlighted by excellent versions of "Shakedown Street," "Truckin'" and one more acoustic number — Bob Weir's instrumental tour de force "Heaven Help The Fool."

All in all, *Dead Ahead* is a terrific look at the band a year and a half into Brent's tenure with the group, which, as fate would have it, also turned out to be the group's halfway point. (The same audio and video source material also yielded two live double albums released four months apart in 1981 — the acoustic *Reckoning* and the electric *Dead Set* — as well as a 70-minute Showtime special that aired before

*Dead Ahead* was released.)

The next big burst of video work from the band comes from 1985. In late April the Dead secretly convened at the Marin Veterans Auditorium in San Rafael (Marin County, CA), just minutes from their office and rehearsal space/studio, to shoot three long days of the group performing a variety of songs on the empty auditorium's stage. At the time they weren't sure what might become of the footage (and the multitrack recordings), as Dell'Amico and Garcia had discussed several different possible approaches, including one that would incorporate a script and dialog for animated creatures based on some of Garcia's fanciful drawings, and another that would take a more documentary-style look at the Dead's history.

What they settled on instead became the award-winning conceptual video **So Far**, which makes its maiden appearance on DVD in this box. The video contains footage from the Marin sessions, live portions from the Dead's 1985 New Year's Eve concert at the Oakland Coliseum Arena (a show that was broadcast on the commercial USA Network cable channel — another first for the band), and then a *whole bunch* of often amazing visual material: old newsreel footage of dancers in the '20s and '30s, still images of everything from American Indians to outer space, plus some sequences created by computer specifically for the video, much of it seriously electronically altered for psychedelic effect.

After Garcia and Dell'Amico had assembled the audio track, they had to figure out which images, besides the Marin and Oakland band footage, they could employ to create something that would be visually interesting. As Garcia told me in 1987, around the time *So Far* was released: "We did a lot of brainstorming, just thinking, 'What kind of images do Grateful Dead songs conjure?' Well... nature, powerful forces of various sorts, volcanoes erupting, tornados, lightning, strong winds, the ocean and other archetypal things like fire and that sort of stuff. Then we got into human endeavors — everything that people do. And then we went off in an abstract space — OK, the music might not directly suggest these things, but these things are suggested by things that are suggested. So then we got into things like architecture, stained glass windows, tanks, that sort of stuff. It was really a sort of free-associative thing that took place over several months, just collecting lists and lists."

The video editors put together dozens of cassettes of footage and photos broken down by the multitude of categories they'd conceived:

"We'd go into these postproduction places and have seven one-inch machines going for playback with different things on every machine," Dell'Amico said in '87. Then, with Garcia and Dell'Amico directing the work flow, the video team spent untold hours *playing* — trying out countless combinations of images, changing them outrageously using the top computer video manipulation tools of the day, letting the piece *emerge*, in a sense, from the image banks.

Dell'Amico again: "The idea is that instead of laying it out from a strictly cerebral starting point...it's more like you sculpt it as you go."

Garcia: "The video is the Grateful Dead way of doing things, which turns out to be expensive, difficult and unrepeatable. If we went back to do this again, we'd come out with a different finished version. We couldn't repeat it. If you're going to do something, it's important — for me, at any rate — to shoot high, even if you miss, or even if you're accused of being pretentious...We were after the idea of electronic mind-altering and consciousness-altering. And, on that level, I think it's pretty successful."

*So Far* was part of what seemed in 1987 like a full-on Grateful Dead assault on mainstream America. That summer they played a series of sold-out stadium shows backing Bob Dylan (playing their own sets too). They released *In The Dark*, containing the Top 10 single "Touch Of Grey" (its success aided by a Gary Gutierrez-directed MTV video of life-sized puppet skeletons performing the song). And the media that had long ignored the group as hippie relics suddenly couldn't get enough of them.

Dell'Amico was brought onboard over the next few years to capture the group's big stadium shows (and also a few others at places like Alpine Valley in Wisconsin and Shoreline Amphitheatre south of SF) — providing live video during the sets for folks far from the stage at large venues, while also addressing Garcia's desire to build a video archive for the future. From the outset of this period, however, Garcia, inspired by the process of working on *So Far*, insisted that Dell'Amico occasionally incorporate psychedelic visuals into the video feed that was being projected on large screens in the stadiums.

According to Dell'Amico: "When we were talking about summer tour '87, Jerry said, 'I don't want to just have a video where it's just us playing, because we're boring — we don't dance, we don't take our clothes off. I want to be able to do some of the stuff we did in the video, but live.' And some of the other band members started talking

about how in the old days it was like a three-ring circus, with the band playing and Kesey doing his thing and a light show and all this other stuff going on."

"So it was a directive from the top [to use video effects]. If you were in the stadium, they *worked*; there was no doubt. People were losing their minds when that stuff was going on because they were high on acid or whatever," he chuckles. "You take them away from the band for a bit, mess with them a little, and then when the band comes back it gets a rise from the crowd; it's an old show-biz tease. But whenever I shot high-end [i.e., in stadiums], I also recorded with no effects too."



The Grateful Dead portions of two of the 1987 shows with Bob Dylan were released in 2003 as Volume IV of the band's archival video series **View From The Vault** (which began in 2000 and always included a simultaneous audio CD release of the same show). It features two excellent complete shows from that triumphal period. The concert from Oakland Stadium (July 24, 1987) is an exceptionally lively and high-spirited affair, with the obviously pumped-up band delighting hometown fans with such crowd-pleasers as "Jack Straw," "Mississippi Half-Step Uptown Toodleo," "Cassidy" and "Deal" in the first set, and the likes of "Scarlet Begonias," "Playing In The Band," "Uncle John's Band," "Dear Mr. Fantasy," "Bertha" and "Sugar Magnolia" in the second. Two days later the tour moved to Anaheim Stadium in Southern California, and the group hit a series of completely different high notes — with the New Orleans party song "Iko Iko," "West L.A. Fadeaway," "Bird Song" and Dylan's "When I Paint My Masterpiece" among the first set highlights; and an extremely diverse second set that boasted a "Shakedown Street" opener, an epic "Terrapin Station," a deliciously gnarly "The Other One" and a tender and beautiful "Stella Blue."

The Dead capped their spectacular 1987 with a national pay-per-view telecast of their New Year's Eve concert from the Oakland Coliseum — most of it was released to home video in the mid-'90s as **Ticket To New Year's**. Once again the Dead rose to the occasion and

gave the fans in Oakland (including yours truly) and many thousands across the country watching in their living rooms a very well-played and energetic show. The first set's most sparkling gems are "Bertha," "Cold Rain And Snow," "Bird Song" and "The Music Never Stopped." After Bill Graham/Father Time ushers in the New Year riding atop a huge replica of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Dead launch into a high-octane "Hell In A Bucket," followed closely by a warm and welcoming "Uncle John's Band." Once again "Terrapin" is rippling with mystery and magic, and the versions of "The Other One" and "Wharf Rat" that tumble out of the gripping "drums" and "space" segments show the band at the peak of its powers, always moving forward. As they proved with *Dead Ahead*, this is a group not afraid to poke fun at themselves, and *Ticket To New Year's* includes a few more skits, plus a couple of segments showing the typically irreverent band members answering questions posed by Dead Heads.

Next we fast-forward almost two years to the summer of 1989, a particularly strong period for the Dead. After the band rebounded from Garcia's near-death in the summer of '86 (when he slipped into a diabetic coma for a few days), they were on an upward trajectory for the next three-plus years, gaining confidence as Garcia made his remarkable Phoenix-like rise from the abyss. The band was clearly having Big Fun onstage every night, and their enthusiasm was downright infectious. It's no wonder the late '80s were such a period of growth for the band's following.



**Truckin' Up To Buffalo** serves up the complete show from Rich Stadium in Buffalo on July 4, 1989, and it's a hot one. Dell'Amico's direction really lets us see the communication between the players when they're "on" — the subtle cues, the quick exchange of glances and smiles as they dig into a tune or jam. It's really like eavesdropping on the band from an onstage perch. Visually, too, the group's summer '89 stage set is something to behold — the group's enormous PAs on either side of the stage and also the areas behind and above the band

are festooned with nearly 60 brightly colored banners and panels of varying sizes and shapes designed by controversial Czech artist Jan Sawka. Some have sensuous patterns and abstract shapes on them, others depict elements of the natural world — trees, the sun, the moon's phases. It's big and bold and also appropriately psychedelic; weird in that uniquely Grateful Dead way.

The show is uniformly strong, from the rockin' opening combo of "Bertha" and "Greatest Story Ever Told," through the rest of the varied nine-song first set, which also includes the dreamy "Row Jimmy," the murder ballad "Stagger Lee" and a lovely take on "Looks Like Rain" (during which the crowd in the stadium gets drenched by rain). By the time the second set begins, darkness has fallen, and the Sawka backdrop takes on an even dreamier quality as it is illuminated by GD lighting director Candace Brightman. There's no letup from the band, either. It's "Touch Of Grey" out of the gate — always a winner when 50,000 people are singing along! — and then we get to tag along on a scenic journey through an eclectic selection of songs, from the calypso bounce of "Man Smart, Woman Smarter" to "Ship Of Fools," "Playing In The Band" and "Terrapin Station," all before another killer Mickey-Bill percussion duel. Brent's pretty "I Will Take You Home" drifts out of "space," and that's followed by the noisy, swirling maelstrom that is Dylan's "All Along The Watchtower," a moving and powerful "Morning Dew" and finally a joyous "Not Fade Away" with Jerry and Brent trading both riffs and grins. This being July Fourth, "U.S. Blues" is the natural encore.

Two weeks and seven shows after the Buffalo extravaganza, the Dead returned to one of their favorite Midwest haunts, Alpine Valley Music Theatre in East Troy, Wisconsin, for three shows. This scenic amphitheater has a covered seating area and a huge, steep back lawn section that the Dead had no problem filling by the late '80s. **Downhill From Here**, which consists of the entire July 17, 1989, Alpine show — save for three songs at the end of the first set that were swapped out for three from the first set of the concert two nights later — was one of the first commercial videos the Dead released in the years right after Garcia's death, and it still stands as one of the best.

In the first set there's a nice assortment of moods and tempos, from the cool funk of "Feel Like A Stranger" to the hyper bluegrass feel of "Cumberland Blues" to Weir's confident rendition of Dylan's convoluted "Desolation Row." "Built To Last" was still a relative rarity in the repertoire, while "Deal" never fails to get the crowd going crazy.

The second set's "pre-drums" segment moves from the bounce and drive of "China Cat Sunflower" › "I Know You Rider" to "Playing In The Band" and the always-affirming "Uncle John's Band," then right into the still-new Garcia ballad "Standing On The Moon" — wow! The back half of the set ranges from a sing-along version of "The Wheel" to Brent and Phil's foot-stomping take on "Gimme Some Loving," "Going Down The Road Feeling Bad" and "Not Fade Away."

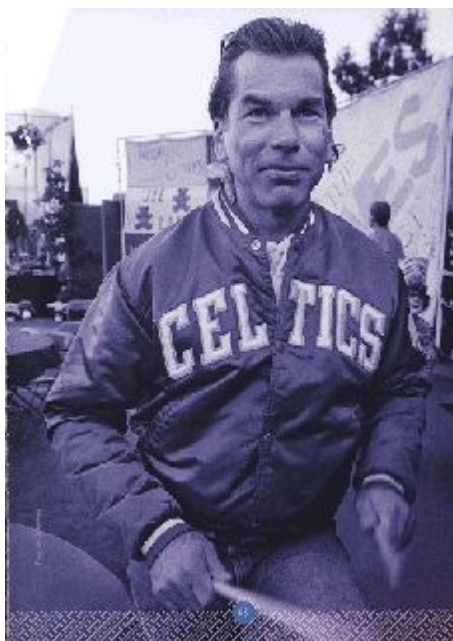
The show that dominates **View From The Vault III** took place a little less than a year after the Alpine shows: June 16, 1990, at Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View, CA, south of San Francisco. This turned out to be the last tour for Brent Mydland, who died in late July 1990, but here the sextet is still going strong, with no hint of the calamity to come. This is another show I attended, and it was easily among the best of the dozen I saw that year. This particular concert is revered for its extraordinary second set, which includes solid versions of "China Cat" › "I Know You Rider," "Estimated Prophet" and "Terrapin" before the band launches into one of their most interesting and exploratory jams during this era. The full group stays onstage for what seems like an eternity, tossing musical ideas around, moving from riffs to unusual melodic lines to deep space, all following some unknown directive from who knows where. The "drums" segment takes that experimental approach into assorted other directions, and then it all eventually resolves at an overwhelming version of the heavy ballad "China Doll" — before the celebratory "Sugar Magnolia" ending. I remember happily wondering aloud at the end of the set: "What the hell was *that*?"

The first set is also loaded with goodies, including the opening trifecta of Sam Cooke's "Let The Good Times Roll," "Truckin'" and "Touch Of Grey"; the seldom-played "Big Boss Man"; and an over-the-top "One More Saturday Night." Bonus footage on the DVD consists of the first six songs from the October 3, 1987, concert at Shoreline (the group's second-ever show at that new venue) and is perhaps most notable for the N'awlins funk rave-up "Hey Pocky Way" and one of the few extant video versions of Weir's slithery "My Brother Esau."

The first **View From The Vault** release, (recorded July 8, 1990, from the now-demolished Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh) gets off to a rollicking start with "Touch Of Grey" and "Greatest Story Ever Told" and keeps grooving with the old British folk number "Jack-A-Roe" — always a treat. Phil does a great job singing Dylan's "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," and the set-ending "Let It Grow" has some fierce and feral jamming. In the second set, there's "Samson And Delilah,"

"Eyes Of The World" leading into "Estimated Prophet" (reverse of how they usually played that duo), plus "Terrapin," the gritty blues of Willie Dixon's "Wang Dang Doodle," "Turn On Your Lovelight" and more. The encore is an emotional "Knockin' On Heaven's Door."

Also worth noting is this disc's bonus material — from the more intimate Cardinal Stadium, in Louisville, Kentucky, two nights earlier (July 6, 1990). Two of the best numbers on *View From The Vault* come from this addendum: a magnificent "Standing On The Moon," sung with tremendous passion and nuance by Garcia; and a hot, bluesy 13-minute excursion labeled "KY Jam," which hints at the "Wang Dang" that would appear two nights later, but also goes to some other cool spaces.



Our decades-spanning video tour concludes with **View From The Vault II**, a show from (long-gone) RFK Stadium in Washington, DC, on June 14, 1991. A few months after Brent Mydland's death in the summer of '90, the Dead had returned to the road as a septet, with the keyboard slot occupied by *two* players — Vince Welnick and Bruce Hornsby. Vince, formerly of The Tubes, was chosen as the permanent replacement for Brent. But Hornsby and his grand piano (and occasional accordion) were on hand for nearly every Dead show from the fall of '90 to the spring of '92, and he certainly had a huge impact on the band's sound. A confident and inventive soloist and accompanist, Hornsby seemed to have an especially close musical relationship with Garcia. Their music together is filled with bright

conversation, spirited mutual searches of the unknown and also a ton of little musical in-jokes.

The '91 RFK Stadium concert captures this incarnation of the group at its finest, laying down thick layers of interweaving parts and fearlessly jamming on some of the group's most challenging material. The second set, for instance, opens with a potent version of the much-loved trilogy "Help On The Way" › "Slipknot!" › "Franklin's Tower," moves into "Estimated Prophet" and then offers up an interstellar "Dark Star" (a tune Hornsby clearly relished playing at every opportunity). The heartfelt ballads "Stella Blue" and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" show that this lineup wasn't just about power-playing, either. "Maggie's Farm" turns up in the first set (it's a double-Dylan night!), as does "Jack-A-Roe," "Black-Throated Wind" and "The Music Never Stopped."

This DVD's bonus footage returns to RFK a year earlier for a portion of one of Brent's last shows. We get a very different-sounding "Dark Star," as well as "Victim Or The Crime," "Foolish Heart" and Phil leading the group through a reassuring and hopeful "Box Of Rain": "Believe it if you need it; if you don't, just pass it on..."



There's an oft-quoted Bill Graham statement about the Dead that was plastered on a wall outside of Winterland for years: "They're not the best at what they do — they're the only ones that do what they do." It was true when the Dead were around, and it is still true 17 years after the group played their last notes together. The powerful alchemy that made the Grateful Dead the unique beast it was is evident in every show in this DVD set. We see the band age before our eyes, but the music remains timeless — never moored to the group's glorious past, but always somehow *right* for the era in which it was performed. And that's because the band members never rested on their laurels and *always* trusted their collective Muse to direct them to interesting new places and weird but wonderful spaces... commercial considerations and music industry imperatives be damned.

You can find nearly the whole history of American music spread across these discs, with music encompassing rock, folk, blues, jazz,

country, ragtime, soul, funk, modern classical and avant-garde elements. Where else can you hear songs by Chuck Berry, Merle Haggard, Bob Dylan, Howlin' Wolf, Johnny Cash and Buddy Holly, unifying anthems, party rave-ups, songs of existential longing, murder ballads, cowboy tunes, love songs, primal drums and dissonant electronics all in one place? The Grateful Dead created a rich and sumptuous psychedelic patchwork quilt stitched together with magical golden thread. Sad to say, we'll never see anything quite like them come this way again — but at least we have the recorded footage, reminding us that it wasn't just a beautiful dream...

